DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 242 UD 030 147

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TITLE A Place at the Table: The Changing Role of Urban Public Education Funds.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1994).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; *Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Financial Policy; *Financial Support; Policy Formation; *Politics of Education; *Public Education; School Districts; School Restructuring; *Urban Education

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the degree to which the public education funds in selected districts have become players at the policy table and examines the factors that permit funds to have a credible voice in the turbulent political world of urban districts without seriously jeopardizing their working "inside" relationships with these systems. The analysis draws extensively from the public education fund in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania), PATHS/PRISM: The Philadelphia Partnership for Education, and includes interviews with a total to 25 current and former members of the organization, as well as other top-level officials, and panel presentations by executive directors of various funds. A significant number of funds were found to have taken on projects with goals to effect structural change in individual schools, clusters of schools, or across an entire district or throughout a set of districts. These funds have risked alienating their school-district partners whose goodwill they have cultivated in earlier projects. The ability of public education funds to be policy players appears to depend on whether a district's superintendent is willing to permit this type of involvement. Overall, findings indicate that the multiple roles that public education funds were set up to play (supporter, convener, facilitator, catalyst for change) have stood them in good stead as they have evolved in the past 10 to 15 years. Contains 20 references. (GLR)

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A PLACE AT THE TABLE: THE CHANGING ROLE OF URBAN PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDS

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Paper presented at the annual meetings

of the

American Educational Research Association

New Orleans, April, 1994

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Public-private partnerships in support of urban schools have proliferated since the late 1970s but their impact has often been uneven and short-lived. One type of partnership, however, the public education funds found in more than sixty American cities, has established itself as a durable organizational entity making long-term contributions to a range of school improvement efforts. These locally-based non-profit funds were established during the last ten to fifteen years, most with the help of "seed money" from the Ford Foundation, with the goal of being a vehicle for business and civic leaders to provide political and financial support for impoverished school systems. The work of many of these funds has evolved over the years from a support role, providing enrichment and small grants to teachers, to one of working for systemic reform and school restructuring through whole-school change efforts and initiatives that promote collaborative problem-solving around districtwide issues such as curriculum, governance, and management. It is clear that this early work in a support role allowed the organizations to take root and flourish.[1] What is less clear is how effectively they have made the change to a more complicated and conflictual policy role.

The executive director of the Public Education Fund Network (PEFNET) in Washington, D.C., an organization that links the funds in a national network, has argued that the effectiveness of these funds over the years has "earned them a place at the policy making table in their communities."[2] This paper will explore the degree to which the public education funds in selected districts have indeed become players at the policy table, and will examine the factors which allow funds to have a credible voice in the turbulent political world of urban districts without seriously jeopardizing their working "inside" relationships with these systems.

Data and Methods

The evidence for this analysis draws extensively from the experience of the public education fund in Philadelphia, PATHS/PRISM: The Philadelphia Partnership for Education, the third largest of the nation's funds with an annual budget of $4 million. Information was also collected from the two largest funds, the Fund for New York City Public Education ($9.7 million) and the Los Angeles Educational Partnership ($8.2 million) as well as from other funds that have moved in the direction of whole-school restructuring and system-wide change. These included the Public Education Coalition in metropolitan Denver ($1.2 million), the San Francisco Education Fund (approximately $2 million), and the Chattanooga area Public Education Foundation (approximately $1 million).

The data for this paper comes from several sources. The authors, who are staff members at PATHS/PRISM, are participant observers in the world of this one fund. They interviewed 18 current and former members of the organization in personal semi-structured interviews, ranging in length from 20 minutes to one hour, in order to reconstruct the ten-year history of the fund's relationship with the School District of Philadelphia. In addition, interviews were conducted with three top-level administrators in the School District, one teacher-leader who played a long-term key role in district-wide staff development, two staff members of another public/private educational partnership in the District, and a foundation officer with long experience with school reform partnerships. Telephone interviews with executive directors or directors of the five additional public education funds listed above were also carried out (seven interviews) as was an interview with an officer of PEFNET. All 33 interviews were conducted in March, 1994.

Additional evidence came from panel presentations by executive directors of the funds in New Orleans, Providence, Rhode Island, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Worcester, Massachusetts at the November, 1993, annual meeting of PEFNET. Documents such as annual reports and specific program reports from fund sites were collected as well. Data collected in Philadelphia included information from a related study of PATHS/PRISM's role in whole- school change efforts in seven schools which involved personal interviews with 80 teachers, administrators, and

parents during the fall of 1993.[3] Evaluations of PATHS/PRISM's work and relationship with the School District of Philadelphia conducted over the last three years by an outside evaluator for a major foundation were also analyzed for this study.

Public Education Funds: The Rationale and the Roles

Local public education funds that are the subject of this paper were created to help shore up urban school districts that have been faced with shrinking budgets and an increasingly impoverished and racially isolated student body. The goal was to bring together key business, civic, and education leaders to provide resources, ideas, and a spirit of innovation in order to support and improve the public educational system of one or more contiguous districts. The funds were set up to be quick-moving, flexible, and entrepreneurial with small staffs focused on raising additional public and private dollars and overseeing a range of reform-oriented programs. Their growth during the 1980s and 1990s can be attributed in part to their ability to respond rapidly to new opportunities, their personalized and prompt delivery of payments and other services to teachers and school staff, and their willingness to account for the success or failure of their projects to their independent boards.

The fact that these funds are inside/outside organizations--"inside" in their commitment to work over the long haul exclusively with their constituent districts and with boards that include school district and union leadership yet "outside" in funding sources and governance--enables them to work well with teachers in a way that a district or short-term consultant or funders often cannot. The non-bureaucratic nature of this organizational type, its less politicized environment, the fact that much of its work is based on competitive peer review, and its stance on accountability explains in part why outside public and private funding agencies are often more amenable to awarding grants to public education funds than they are to large school districts.

The roles of these funds have been variously described as resource provider and developer, broker, convener, facilitator, catalyst for change, friendly critic, change agent, experimenter, and advocate for policy change.[4] Most of the funds, particularly the larger ones, play nearly all of these roles in one way or another. Indeed, within one project, their role can change from site to site depending on the needs of a school or team of teachers. These multiple functions are not always compatible. A "friendly critic" can be a much more threatening role to district (or union) administrators than that of a "facilitator" or "resource provider." The organizations must walk a precarious line in order to avoid becoming a close uncritical supporter of a district where its comparatively small supplemental funds might become "like a bucket of sand emptied on to a beach" [5] or, at the other extreme, a distant self-righteous critic ("the wise adolescent on the corner of the district") whose arrogant stance hampers its effectiveness in meaningful collaboration for real school change.

The Early Work: Changing Instruction Without Changing Structures

Those funds established in the late 1970s and early 1980s supported innovation in their districts but did so in the roles of resource-provider and facilitator in a manner that usually avoided posing a serious threat to the status quo. An evaluation of the activities of 50 funds supported by the Ford Foundation and other foundations between 1983 and 1988 found that their resources were heavily weighted toward awarding mini-grants to teachers (averaging $662) for experimental projects or for public relations activities in support of the school district.[6] "Public relations" was often done with the goal of involving business and civic leaders in educational issues given that the urban districts were sorely in need of high-clout supporters in an era of middle class flight from the schools. Other kinds of activities that typified the funds' involvement during that period included brokering adopt-a-school programs, serving as a fiscal agent or conduit for private and public

grants to the school district, and arranging high quality intensive staff development opportunities for teachers.

Some of the early work of the public education fund in Philadelphia, PATHS/PRISM, illustrated these kinds of activities: awarding mini-grants to teachers, serving as a fiscal agent for local sites of national experimental projects (such as Project 2061 of the American Association for the Advancement of Science), and providing staff development opportunities for individual teachers or teams of teachers from across the district. Although the educational philosophy and instructional strategies characterizing PATHS/PRISM's training efforts were sometimes at variance with the rest of the district's more traditional and rigidly-paced standardized curriculum, this work did not challenge school and district practices in a way that would lead to long-term structural change. The projects often resulted in changing classroom instruction of individual teachers participating in the programs but did not look at conditions providing a context for that teaching.

In some respects, however, the effort in Philadelphia was atypical compared to that of other funds in that the original major projects of PATHS/PRISM were launched with the goal of bringing about system-wide curriculum change. The Philadelphia Alliance for the Teaching of Humanities in the Schools (PATHS) began in 1984 as a joint venture of the corporate, foundation, and university communities with the School District of Philadelphia. It began with an explicit philosophy that educational reform should begin with curriculum change and should include intensive teacher involvement and teacher leadership.[7] The following year, the same coalition created the Philadelphia Renaissance in Science and Mathematics (PRISM). The two organizations merged in 1987. A reform-minded Superintendent of Schools, Constance Clayton, helped found the organizations and charged them with assisting in system-wide re-creation of aspects of the standardized citywide curriculum which she had introduced in 1984. PATHS raised outside funds for major efforts in reforming the teaching of writing, American history, and secondary world history.[8] These multi-year projects did indeed have a system-wide impact: the writing curriculum was transformed throughout the District and the new inquiry-oriented, thematic, multicultural world history curriculum became part of the mandated standardized curriculum.

PATHS/PRISM tried to take a much bolder leap into curriculum change in 1989 when, along with a senior member of the Superintendent's staff, it proposed to become a curriculum institute for the District overseeing a decentralized curriculum and staff development system that would have replaced the District's central curriculum office. The Superintendent backed off from this plan, and shortly afterward she fired her chief of staff who had helped devise it. PATHS/PRISM's executive director resigned shortly thereafter. After that point, the fund redirected its work toward whole-school restructuring and renewal, the kind of work that leads inevitably to broader policy questions such as curriculum, assessment, and personnel policies. A more open environment for dialogue on important educational questions has been created since the Superintendent's retirement in 1993.[9]

The New Agenda: Restructuring Schools and Re-inventing District Policies

In a number of the longer-lived funds, their dominant role has shifted from being just a resource-provider and relatively uncritical supporter of a district to that of catalyst and agent of long-term change willing to speak frankly about the need for systemic reform. Funds which have established a reservoir of goodwill and trusting relationships through their work over the years are often well-positioned to recommend new practices and then to follow up with assistance in their implementation. Some of the newer partnerships, such as New York City and Chattanooga which were formed in the late 1980s, jumped quickly into a policy-oriented approach and skipped over the lower-key stage experienced by the older funds.

A description of the work of many of the urban public education funds today looks quite different than it did in the early years. While not abandoning programs such as mini-grants to teachers, which have generated enormous goodwill and which have served as small research and development laboratories in districts, the funds have expanded their work to include major pilot efforts involving whole schools or clusters of schools as well as initiatives whose object is to deal directly with thorny district-wide barriers to reform. Schoolwide restructuring and renewal efforts invariably run up against deep-seated practices that impede change, an experience that often propels the funds to articulate the problems and then push for reform. In other cases, the funds tackle district-wide policy issues head-on rather than identifying and addressing them more circuitously through work in schools.

Just as the public education funds have readjusted their strategies, the school districts have often done so as well. Policy shifts are taking place within a changed context. A national agenda for systemic change in areas such as curriculum, assessment, school governance, staff development, program accountability and urban school district management has emerged among educational decision-makers and researchers in the last five or so years. School-based restructuring and renewal (variously defined but usually including reducing professional isolation of teachers, creating more participatory site-based management governance structures, and promoting active inquiry-oriented learning opportunities for students) have become buzzwords in the education community and among private and public funders. Given these developments, it is scarcely surprising that public education funds have reoriented and expanded their work so that it is aligned with these national trends.

An illustration of these trends can be seen in the urban districts that have taken steps to downsize their central office staffs and decentralize governance to some degree either to regions or sub-districts and to the school site. In Philadelphia, for example, the central Curriculum Office went from 289 staff people in 1989 to only 16 in 1994. At the same time, more power has devolved to regional superintendents and to schools. The schools can engage in a more participatory governance structure either through the process established by Chapter 1/Schoolwide Projects and/or through the school-based management/shared decision-making initiative begun by Superintendent Clayton and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers in 1990. Increasingly, discretionary funds such as Schoolwide Projects monies are targeted to individual schools.

The central curriculum office in Philadelphia now seeks to facilitate and support the myriad reform efforts underway in schools across the District rather than deliver top-down mandates. Without the direction of the central office, the targets for reform have become more complex. It would no longer be possible, for example, to develop a system-wide world history project. As a result of the work of other public/private partnerships in the city, The Philadelphia Schools Collaborative (funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts) and the Philadelphia High School Academies, more than 60 percent of the students in the comprehensive high schools are enrolled in charters or schools-within-schools where curriculum can be adapted and created for that smaller group. The increasingly localized context has prompted some top administrators in the Philadelphia system to encourage PATHS/PRISM to become more of a broker of staff development and other services tailored to individual school sites.

Other kinds of changes have occurred as well since the veteran public education funds began their work. The children attending schools in urban districts are more likely than was the case ten to fifteen years ago to be from low income homes, from minority groups, from single parent families, and from households where English is not the first language. The turbulence of urban school politics has shortened the tenure of the average superintendent to less than three years, and budget cuts combined with growing enrollments have worsened schools' financial plight.

Pressing the Policy Borders Through Whole-School Change

The work of PATHS/PRISM since 1990 illustrates the ways in which public education funds' initiatives are increasingly being targeted toward change that affects an entire school or clusters of schools in a feeder pattern. The organization has moved away from a strategy of implementing a broad array of district-wide curricular and staff development programs and is instead focusing its resources on the more difficult but potentially more productive task of whole-school change. This strategy not only reflects the school renewal/restructuring agenda which has come to the fore among educational policymakers nationally but comes out of PATHS/PRISM's evaluation on its previous work. By 1990, the organization had come to see the limits of working with individual teachers or teams of teachers from across the District who returned enthusiastically to their schools but had difficulty disseminating their ideas to their colleagues. (In the words of one teacher, "we were seen as crazed outsiders" by the rest of the school staff.)

As a result of this reassessment, PATHS/PRISM began a three-year whole-school change initiative in five elementary and two middle schools that approached school renewal from the standpoint of site-based teacher-driven curricular change. The initiative also successfully spearheaded the District's new effort in school-based management and shared decision-making.[10] Then, together with the District, the fund became involved in a sequence of two pilot efforts to restructure middle schools (eight schools in the first initiative and six in the second one) along the lines recommended by the Carnegie Commission and other national reform groups.[11] Other whole-school renewal projects are underway as well: one initiative with eighteen schools focuses on the arts as a vehicle of schoolwide re-invigoration and another project with a K-12 cluster uses science and math as a focus for reform. Plans are in the works for intensive work with one or more feeder patterns of schools to provide support for students as they move from one level of education to the next.

This kind of work is more complicated and potentially more controversial than the kind of "elegant teacher development" which characterized the activities of the organization during its first few years. (In internal discussions, these earlier efforts are often referred to as *"nice* programs.") Working with whole schools can raise questions of power and control both in the context of the individual schools and with school system officials as well. As one PATHS/PRISM program officer observed:

> In the first staff development programs I was involved in, those were definitely less challenging to the status quo. We were not asking teachers to change anything at the *school*. I never knew the principals ... [The new programs] ask the big questions right away, up front. In the past programs, we had hidden hopes. Now we have the freedom to be up front on what we want ... [My new program] asks the hard questions about assessment, curriculum, and teachers working in teams, and how much authority the principal will cede to the teachers.

The work with whole schools has inevitably brought the fund (and other funds) face to face with structural roadblocks to reform. This is especially true at the middle and high school levels where staffing and scheduling policies are more complex than they are in elementary schools. It is difficult, for example, to engage in schoolwide staff development activities and school-year kickoff events for teachers when a significant proportion of the permanent teachers have not yet been hired and a scattering of teachers are re-assigned to other schools in October. (In one middle school, 25 percent of the teachers in September, 1993, were assigned temporarily until new teachers were

hired during the next three months.) Successful pilot efforts founder when principals experience forced transfer or when they change frequently from year to year.

Additional factors confound schoolwide reform efforts as well including the inability to control teacher hiring at the school level, standardized test requirements, and contractual limitations on which teachers can teach which classes. In this kind of initiative, as one program officer argued, "you *have* to challenge policy if you are going to make change." And often, as another fund staffer noted, the schools themselves want these changes in policy as well. The push for policy changes has thus far been expressed in a low-key way through program evaluations, in day-to-day conversations at the school site, and in broader policy discussions with school and civic officials.

As in Philadelphia, the Public Education Coalition in metropolitan Denver, which serves five school districts including the Denver Public Schools, has become involved in whole school work and has also come up against structural barriers to reform in that context. The Coalition undertook a major systemic school renewal initiative in 1989 with 17 schools in four school districts. The initiative was aimed at improving student outcomes through such changes as curriculum reform, new uses of time, peer evaluation, shared decision-making, alternative assessment, and reallocation of staff resources with the overall goal of creating "a critical mass of successful, innovative demonstration schools."[12] The Coalition has also worked intensively with 90 schools (three years with each) over the last nine years through its Literacy League project in the area of reading and language arts.

When the Coalition staff encounter school policy barriers to change, they deal with it by "laying issues on the table very regularly" with principals and pushing principals behind the scenes. In the Literacy League project, schools are chosen through a very competitive process and must demonstrate strong commitment by both teachers and principals to change. In Denver Public Schools, the Coalition has found that it can address policy roadblocks (such as assessment measures) through the Collaborating Decisionmaking Committees that are mandated at each school site. These committees are made up of representatives from teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, and non-parent community members. They were created in the early 1990s when the Governor intervened in the district's labor dispute and were given sweeping powers over issues such as curriculum and assessment.

The Fund for New York City Public Education also includes comprehensive school restructuring as one of its three areas of programmatic focus. The Fund undertook the brokering and facilitating that launched New York's New Visions Schools in 1993, a group of 16 small new community-designed public schools. It is providing technical assistance and staff development opportunities for these schools. Fund staff have succeeded in negotiating an agreement with the school district and union allowing teachers to be hired at the school site and without regard for the seniority provisions in the teachers' union contract. Another initiative works with seven clusters of schools (a middle school with its feeder elementaries) in the area of staff development, curriculum, student services, and facilitation of students' transitions from elementary to middle school. Other school interventions include a project introducing new student assessment strategies in 50 schools, an effort that has led to system-wide changes in assessment, including performance-based testing measures in mathematics and more comprehensive summaries of school achievement measures. The Fund plans to produce a school report card that will be an information tool for parents and other interested parties.[13] The nature of the Fund's work means that it is, in the words of one observer, "pushing the policy borders every day."

The Los Angeles Educational Partnership (LAEP) has become centrally involved in whole-school change as well. The LAEP's role in pushing policy change varies from that of funds in some other districts because in Los Angeles there are many groups pressing for reform. The

current superintendent is eager for change, court orders over the years have gone a long way in equalizing resources, and the state department of education has spearheaded curriculum and other reforms. The fund's task is to target its expertise in the most productive way possible as part of this broader reform movement. While seeing itself as a "friendly critic" of the district, it works closely with reformers within the system. "We are dependent on these people to bring to life what we put in place" noted one staffer. Strategies for change which the LAEP adopts are generated collaboratively with people in the district, and it seek to bring together inside change agents with other groups outside the system.

Building on its long record of work in developing teacher leaders and fashioning new curricula, the LAEP has become a partner in the district-wide LEARN initiative, a site-based school restructuring effort that will eventually reach all 600 schools. LEARN is an independent organization with 700 business and community partners working hand in hand with the district to implement school-based management and an array of other reforms determined at the school level. The LAEP is one of several important players in this reform effort, contributing in the areas of curriculum and staff development where it has a strong track record of innovative experimentation. It wants to insure that the initiative does not become too focused on governance but instead directs its energy to real classroom change. In this way it sees itself as providing substance and depth to the mobilization for school improvement. The fund is also involved in other whole-school change projects, one with a science and mathematics curriculum focus that links schools in a common feeder pattern, and another that develops strong teacher networks within school sites.

Unlike Los Angeles and most of the urban funds, the Public Education Foundation in Chattanooga, Tennessee, is looked to by the media and other small non-profit groups as the leading outside voice for school reform in the two districts it serves. It has avoided succumbing to pressures from the districts to play just a support role providing supplemental funding and has instead pursued an independent agenda. Its success in doing so stems from the potency of its board, which has strong private sector involvement and the size of its endowment and other resources. When Foundation officials have disagreed with the practices of the two school systems (whose superintendents sit on their board), they have asserted their views forcefully but have done so in private.

The Chattanooga area Public Education Foundation was founded in 1988 with the goal of being a change agent for both the city and county school systems in its metropolitan area. It saw itself as having a role in policy deliberations from its inception. The Foundation was inspired by a successful whole-school change project involving extensive private sector support. The private partners realized they could play a wider role and moved to form the Foundation. Thus it began already having had experience in the school renewal process. The Foundation raised an endowment now totaling $6.8 million which is augmented by additional grants. It has worked in whole-school change efforts such as one that restructures a large elementary school into smaller units and another that infuses the Paideia philosophy into curriculum and teaching at three other schools. In addition, it has engaged in a wide range of professional staff development opportunities across the districts often with the intent of building collegial relations and peer support in school buildings.

The San Francisco Education Fund has taken some steps in the direction of whole-school change and policy work. The fund coordinates a study group for principals which introduces them to issues in school renewal and restructuring. Grants for whole-school change projects will be available to those principals who choose to follow up their study group experience with a project at their school. The fund is also involved in planning a Library Power proposal to the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund for a library-centered school renewal project. (If funded, San Francisco would join about twenty other public education funds which are engaged in these projects with technical assistance from the American Library Association and PEFNET.) This program propels funds into the policy arena by requiring them to negotiate tricky policy issues

involving personnel and resource allocation with their school districts as a condition of receiving the grant.

Entering the Policy Arena Directly

Some of the public education funds have taken up system-wide policy issues more directly rather than addressing policy issues only in the context of whole-school change initiatives. The fund in New York City, for example, convenes "Chancellor's strategic working groups" made up of experts both from the private sector and from inside the school system to make recommendations to the Chancellor on significant issues. The eight groups convened thus far have addressed questions such as mathematics education, overcrowding in the high schools, improving computerized management information services at the school level, and arts and cultural education. These groups are staffed by Fund program directors or by consultants, and their reports have had an impact on policy. The report on mathematics education, for example, led to system-wide curricular change and altered high school graduation requirements.[14]

The Denver-area Public Education Coalition sponsored a management audit of its member districts during 1988 and 1989. This "management efficiency study," the brainchild of the Coalition but carried out with an invitation from the superintendents, examined the districts' planning, administrative organization, cash management and investment strategies, and personnel administration. Coordinated by a steering committee consisting of executives of 13 large corporations and the superintendents, the initiative led to a non-partisan assessment of the organizational health of the districts. Some of its recommendations were carried out, including the hiring of a chief financial officer for the Denver Public Schools.

The Public Education Fund in Providence, Rhode Island, which describes itself as "an advocate and ombudsman helping the stakeholders to change," sponsored the establishment of a 30-member commission which met for 18 months in 1992 and 1993 to conduct a wide-ranging independent assessment of the Providence public schools. This commission (called PROBE for PROvidence Blueprint for Education), which was chaired by the President Emeritus of the University of Rhode Island, issued a blistering report of outdated school district practices. The report, however, was written in a constructive tone, offering recommendations based on practices of cities of comparable size. These recommendations addressed issues such as hiring practices (teachers were hired only after serving one to five years as substitute teachers), professional development, the length of the school year and day (which were comparatively short), staff evaluation methods, and financial support for the system.

The aggressive implementation of the PROBE report's 39 recommendations is being overseen by a broadly representative group, the PROBE Council, which includes members of the Public Education Fund board, parents, and community leaders. As soon as the report was completed, the Fund set about raising $1.5 million to implement the reforms. Among other contributions, it received a grant from the Chamber of Commerce to open up a Development Office in the school district. The Mayor agreed to change the way in which school board members were chosen, assenting in the creation of an independent commission that reviewed and recommended candidates, with the result that within a year of the report's publication, four new board members had been appointed through the revised process. Committees chaired by top business people and including school district staff have been appointed to work on the implementation of individual recommendations such as human resources policy and the use of technology. Grant money has been raised to work on breaking up high schools and middle schools into smaller units. The Fund has also been involved in setting up a new high school with a focus on public service.

In Chattanooga, the Public Education Foundation has funded a series of "education policy grants" that have, among other things, assisted the Chattanooga public schools in hiring a Director

of Development as well as training administrators in participatory management and accountability. Another of these grants supports training and consulting expenses for a school-based decision-making initiative in the Hamilton County schools. The Foundation has also conducted a detailed two-year study of professional development needs and promising practices.

The Education Fund in New Orleans has moved into the district-wide policy arena as well. It operates under the aegis of a larger non-partisan civic action group, The Metropolitan Area Committee (MAC), which sees itself as a "consensus builder on community issues." In 1992, the fund along with the Education Issues Committee of MAC convened a broader group of representatives from 25 organizations, the MAC Education Round Table, to become involved in the reform of the New Orleans School Board. The news media had highlighted the abysmal condition of the public schools and MAC targeted the school board elections as an opportunity for school system change. Its pre-election activities included developing a position paper on the qualifications expected of candidates and drawing up a questionnaire ("quiz") that probed each school board candidate's understanding of public education's condition, policy goals, views on personnel management and on the board's role in governance. While MAC did not endorse candidates, the questionnaire responses provided a tool to help voters reach a decision. The Round Table also engineered a public relations effort to increase voter turnout. A new board was elected, with five of the seven elected being first-time members of the board.

The Education Fund's involvement in election activities was a "defining moment" in its history. Prior to 1992, its work had eschewed advocacy for change, concentrating instead on mini-grants to teachers and facilitating school-business partnerships. The MAC parent organization, however, had a propensity toward policy work. Thus, when a new executive vice president of MAC also took over the directorship of the Education Fund, the direction of the latter organization began to include advocacy work. Since the school board election, the Education Fund has taken involvement in governance issues to a new level. It has received grants from PEFNET and the Institute for Educational Leadership to become a site in a national project orchestrated by PEFNET (with funds from the Lilly Endowment) that aims to increase broad-based community involvement in school board governance. The project involves conducting community assessments and forums and coordinating professional development activities for school board members around school governance roles, expectations, and practices. That is, having become involved in the election of the new school board, the Fund took on the role of assisting the board and community groups in a collaborative effort to implement reforms such as strategic planning and site-based management.

In two smaller cities, Worcester, Massachusetts, and Grand Rapids, Michigan, the education funds also have taken on significant policy roles. In the case of Worcester, the Alliance for Education, which began its work with grants to teachers and partnership programs in the mid-1980s, went on to conduct a "stem to stern" assessment of the Worcester school system in 1990. The six month study involved 30 people on five task forces. While initially threatening to the school district administration, the result of the study helped to "make a group of new friends" for the system. The community support that was generated accounted in part for the success of a referendum overriding the property tax cap. In 1993, the fund provided assistance in the search for a new school superintendent, insuring that a professionalized national search be conducted. The work of this fund is connected to broader systemic change statewide since its executive director founded the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education. This group's extensive analysis of state school issues and its recommendations for change became the centerpiece for the state's sweeping Education Reform Act passed in 1993.

The Grand Rapids Public Education Fund also utilized the device of convening a separate task force to examine its public school system with the goal of supporting and sustaining change. A panel of 20 business leaders, educators, parents and representatives of community organizations concluded its study with recommendations for the restructuring of middle schools, the

development of a major new initiative in early childhood education (that became a national demonstration site), and the surveying of public opinion on school reform. The survey results were used to encourage the board of education to launch a community-based strategic planning process. The fund brokered the resources to make the planning possible and then went on to develop an indicators system to measure how well the new plan was being implemented. Before this process was begun, the fund brought the new superintendent of schools into town for a briefing with the school board on the need for planning prior to his taking office.

Conditions Framing the Changing Role

It is apparent from the preceding review that some of the public education funds have expanded or redirected their work since the late 1980s in the direction of system-wide policy and planning issues and/or whole-school change efforts. But taking on such work is risky business for the funds. Their ability to survive and function well as an inside/outside organization depends on their maintaining a good working relationship with a school district and with the teachers' unions. If they are perceived as an irritant by superintendents, school boards, and union leaders, it is possible that they could be reduced to a marginal role doing just some "nice extra programs" for the district or could fade from the scene altogether. The degree to which the funds can have a meaningful impact in these new roles appears to depend on three key factors: the encouragement and support of the school superintendent; visible and strong support from the business community that is channeled through the fund's board or through other organizational vehicles that collaborate with the fund; and the negotiating and coalition-building skills of the fund's staff members.

Some superintendents welcome the local education fund as a convener of critical issues task forces and broker and change agent in whole-school intervention efforts. This has been the case in New York City, for example, since its founding. In Denver, the superintendents whose districts are part of the Public Education Coalition invited the fund to conduct a reassessment of their management practices and then, in some districts, used the audit to build public support on budget and bond issues. The five superintendents attend monthly board meetings and have rallied to help the fund when it has gone through organizational and personnel transitions.

In other instances, however, superintendents want to work with funds only if they can control their direction and programming.[15] In reviewing the first five years of the Ford Foundation's efforts to set up urban local education funds, the director of that effort, David Bergholz, noted that superintendents often defined the attempt at collaboration as "'you're in it with us, and we'll let you know how we (the school system) want the relationship to work.'"[16] Some superintendents are hostile to outside input or judgment no matter how well intentioned. As one foundation officer interviewed for this study put it:

> What a leader can tolerate is what an institution can tolerate. If a leader mistrusts and can't hear criticism, then the institution is paranoid. The role of "friendly critic" could not happen here [after a certain point].

A former education fund official in Philadelphia, reflecting on the relatively low-key policy role of PATHS/PRISM vis-a-vis the School District of Philadelphia over the last five years, observed:

> A friendly critic is a role a local education fund must be *invited* to have. It has to be badly wanted for it to have any chance of succeeding. There has to be a strong invitation from a superintendent. You can't just announce you'll do it.

An educator who has been active in inside/outside organizations in several large cities reflected on the roles of those groups:

> What is a partnership? An interesting question ... School districts are set up so hierarchically that partnership means you do what they want. In inside/outside organizations there are narrow borders on compliance and loyalty.

What appears to be the case, however, is that some superintendents *do* reach out to partnership groups to help wend their way through the political minefields and daunting barriers to change that characterize life in large urban school districts. As one program officer in a fund noted, the district's and the union's willingness to acknowledge how desperate educational conditions are for students prompts them to seek support from the fund and other groups who are committed to the hard work of school reform.

Superintendents and school boards are much more likely to invite public education funds to the policy table on selected issues if the fund has strong business support. If the fund's board has extensive and high level private sector involvement and if corporate contributions to the fund are significant, then it is better able than organizations with weak boards to take on work that "breaks the mold" in school district practices and policy. It is especially well-positioned to convene groups around management audits of districts' financial and personnel practices since that is an area of expertise of the corporations themselves.

Business support for the funds is exceptionally strong in some cities. The boards in New York City, Denver, Los Angeles, and Chattanooga, for example, are weighted toward private sector representation. In New York City and Chattanooga, half of the board members are from major corporations, law firms, or foundations. That percentage is even higher in Los Angeles and Denver where about two thirds to three fourths of the board members are from such organizations. In Philadelphia, where the voice of the business community is comparatively weak in civic affairs in general, representation on the board is lower and corporate contributions to the work of the fund are very modest (comprising less than 4 percent of the fund's budget compared with, for example, 12 percent in New York City and 28 percent in Denver).

The presence of a high-clout board can enable the public education funds to be more assertive in pressing for system-wide change. Most of the funds reviewed in this study who were successful in becoming serious players in school district policy discussions had the backing of potent boards. As the executive director of one fund put it:

> The strength of the board is *key*. It is hard to broker change and challenge practice. You need a strong board and you need resources or you don't have a lever to bring about change. This flies in the face of the notion of having a grass roots board from all sectors of the community.

A strong private sector presence on a public education fund board can help build direct ties between the business community and school superintendents and thus increases superintendents' support for the fund. In Denver, for example, where the board meets monthly and where chief executive officers of major corporations attend on a regular basis (instead of sending designees), the superintendents value the chance to have frank and informative conversations with these private sector representatives. One fund official noted that this forum is important in part because "the superintendents are so similar to CEOs in roles and responsibilities but they are not afforded the same status ... This fills a networking need for them."

The funds that succeed in being a force for change also are skilled at raising issues and pursuing work in a way that defuses friction among the key players. A cardinal rule for virtually all of these organizations is to avoid criticizing the school district or teachers' union in a public way. When open and sharp disagreement occurs, as it sometimes does, it takes place behind closed doors. If comprehensive and potentially critical assessments of districts' practices are undertaken, it is almost always done through the vehicle of a broadly representative commission or task force that is quasi-independent of the fund. The funds see themselves as entities having a long-term commitment to working with school districts regardless of the vicissitudes of districts' (and funds') organizational lives and relationships that inevitably accompany such work. They leave controversial advocacy efforts to other groups and concentrate instead on coalition-building which requires skill at negotiation and communication. Comments from fund officials in three cities illustrate this perspective:

> We have conducted criticism mostly behind closed doors. We are not watchdogs. We want genuine change and we usually do it quietly. But we wrestle where we have to wrestle ... We *really* get down to issues.

> We bring everyone to the table and people appreciate it ... They read everything in advance ... Sure, there are tense times but if there is a sticky problem, we address it directly. We are not trying to 'get them' but we are direct ... We *do* suggest policy changes but we do it in a way to get everyone to agree on an issue.

> Once [a fund] has established its legitimacy, ... it is up to the *political skill* of people on the board and the executive director to develop the working relationship with the school district so they see they can get more done by working with us than not ... Leadership is a factor: people's 'own stuff' really matters. It is ultimately people and how they interact that matters. We are not mere objects in the system.

The importance of day-to-day attention to communication among all parties was stressed by almost everyone interviewed for this study. The sharing of information on a regular basis and timely notice of meetings and other developments are seen as especially important when public education funds take on work that is more threatening to districts. A consensus view among fund leaders is that this type of work requires that key participants be kept informed every step of the way. You can "agree to disagree but always talk," one director noted. Several observed that programs which are potentially a challenge to an administrator's authority can run even more smoothly than less-threatening work when communication processes have been carefully nurtured. They also note that funds' staff members must also be careful to cultivate ties to school district personnel at all levels of a system's hierarchy to guarantee continuity of programming and communication since urban superintendents are typically in place for just a few years.

Good working relationships are also strengthened when change-oriented education fund staff make recommendations to district officials with the assumption that these administrators are equally concerned about student outcomes. One top-level school district official, long involved in innovative change efforts, put it this way:

> The local education fund *should* raise those [important] issues and tell us what patterns and problems they see [in pilot programs in schools]. This would be enormously useful but it has to be done in a respectful and non-hectoring tone. [The funds] would be telling us what we already know but it would put the spotlight on certain problems and help us to sift and prioritize. [Inside/outside organizations] would be letting us off the hook too easily if they didn't let us know. But we must be seen as people who *care as much as they do* [about students' welfare].

Summary and Conclusions

The 1993 strategic plan of the Public Education Fund Network in Washington directed by Wendy Puriefoy envisioned the local education funds moving in a direction from "making a difference" through discrete non-systemic projects to "making change" in a broader policy arena.[17] Indeed, the review of some funds' activities in this study demonstrates that many funds have expanded the scope of their work beyond the initial "warm fuzzy programs" of mini-grants for teachers, public relations, small-scale business-education partnerships and selected staff development initiatives.[18] While not necessarily replacing these approaches, some of which have proven to be extremely effective in "seeding change," a significant number of the funds have taken on projects whose goal is to effect structural change in individual schools, clusters of schools, or across an entire district or set of districts. As one former program director described it, they have gone beyond "taking things as they are and making them a little better to homing in on places where rhetoric differs from reality."

By taking on such policy-relevant work, the funds have risked alienating their school district partners whose goodwill they have cultivated in earlier projects. Fears of ruptured relationships are not altogether unfounded since some attempts to establish local education funds met an early demise after encountering school administrators' hostility.[19] For the most part, however, a number of the local funds have moved successfully onto this new terrain (a few newer funds were there all along). Unlike many advocacy groups, their actual work over the years with teachers and inside schools has enabled them, in the words of one major funder, "to see the discrepancy between school district memos and actual implementation." Assisted by the knowledge gleaned from their direct experience in pilot programs and from the momentum on certain issues generated by the national educational research and policy community, they have been able to play a more significant role in school district decision-making. They have sharpened their convening skills, going beyond assembling stakeholders to muse on vaguely-identified issues but instead bringing together working task forces to solve specific problems facing urban school systems.

The ability of the public education funds to be a policy player appears to depend on whether a district's superintendent is willing to allow this type of involvement, whether there is strong private sector support for the fund's work, and the degree to which the fund's staff members are skilled at negotiating and brokering relationships and building coalitions. Those organizations that become expert at "speaking truthfully and carefully ... without polarizing and blaming," in the words of a major funder, are more likely to establish real partnerships in change. Arriving at change strategies on especially controversial and complex issues is often best accomplished through the convening of new task forces whose identity is not directly tied to the fund.

Of course, the contexts for this kind of work vary greatly from one school district to the next. In some cases, a fund is one of many groups active in school reform efforts while in others

it is a lone and somewhat exposed voice working for change. In another, the politics of the school district required for a time that the fund work behind the scenes on substantive curriculum and staff development work, avoiding spotlighting structural barriers to reform in the district. In yet another, the school district itself has developed a more active reform agenda than the fund.

The multiple roles which public education funds were set up to play--supporter, convener, facilitator, catalyst for change--have stood them in good stead as they have evolved in the last ten to fifteen years. They have operated over the range of these roles, tailoring them to fit the needs of districts and political realities as those change. Many have apparently managed to develop strategies that respond rapidly to these shifting needs and opportunities while at the same time keeping in mind the "long haul approach to problem solving."[20] A more precise estimate of the rate and nature of funds' effectiveness, however, awaits more systematic study.

NOTES

1. David Bergholz, *Five Years: 1983-1988, The Public Education Fund,* report of the Public Education Fund, Pittsburgh, PA, 1988; David Bergholz, "The Public Education Fund," *Teachers College Record,* Vol. 93, No. 3, Spring, 1992, pp. 516-522. The author notes the importance of distinguishing between local school foundations which were set up to cope with districts' budget cuts by providing supplemental funding versus education funds which saw themselves as being constituency builders for urban districts (p. 7 of *Five Years*). For a review of the difficulties inherent in business-education partnerships, see Elizabeth L. Useem, *Low Tech Education in a High Tech World: Corporations and Classrooms in the New Information Society,* New York: The Free Press and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1986.

2. Wendy Puriefoy, "The Interrelationship Between Program and Policy: Creating the Change Paradigm for Local Education Funds," Public Education Fund Network, Washington, D.C., 1993, p. 6.

3. Elizabeth Useem, *Renewing Schools: A Report on the Cluster Initiative in Philadelphia,* PATHS/PRISM: The Philadelphia Partnership for Education, Philadelphia, 1994.

4. For a history and discussion of local education funds, see Gene I. Maeroff, *The Empowerment of Teachers,* New York: Teachers College Press, 1988; David Bergholz, "The Public Education Fund," *Teachers College Record,* Vol. 93, No. 3, Spring, 1992, pp. 516-522; Randolph Jennings (ed.), *Fire in the Eyes of Youth: The Humanities in American Education,* St. Paul: Occasional Press, 1993; Judith Renyi, "The Arts and Humanities in American Education," *Phi Delta Kappan,* February, 1994, pp. 438-445.

5. Gene Maeroff, *The Empowerment of Teachers,* New York: Teachers College Press, 1988, p. 12.

6. *Education Week,* April 20, 1988. (summary of evaluation of the Public Education Fund sites by Paul Nachtigal, Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory)

7. PATHS became one of a network of national sites affiliated with the Collaboratives for Humanities and Arts Teaching (CHART) whose goal was to reform schools through teacher-initiated curricular change, focusing especially on multicultural and global education. See Judith Renyi, "The Arts and Humanities in American Education," *Phi Delta Kappan,* February, 1994, pp. 438-445 for a discussion of CHART's history.

8. J. Lynne White, "Strengthening the Humanities in the Classroom: Writing Across the Curriculum in the Philadelphia Schools," in Jerome M. Rosow and Robert Zager (eds.) *Allies in Educational Reform,* San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1989, pp. 294-314. See also James Culbertson, "Pharaoh's Dreams ... and Ours," in Randolph Jennings (ed.) *Fire in the Eyes of Youth: The Humanities in American Education,* St. Paul: Occasional Press, 1993, pp. 53-60.

9. For a review of Superintendent Clayton's tenure in Philadelphia, see Dale Mezzacappa, "The Tenor of a Tenure," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* August 29, 1993, p. E1.

10. Elizabeth Useem, *Renewing Schools: A Report on the Cluster Initiative in Philadelphia,* PATHS/PRISM: The Philadelphia Partnership for Education, Philadelphia, 1994.

11. Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,* The Carnegie Corporation of New York, New York, 1989.

12. Public Education Coalition, "School Renewal Project: Annual Report, 1990," Denver, 1990, p. 1.

13. Beth Lief, "The New York City Case Study: The Private Sector and the Reform of Public Education," *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 93, No. 3, Spring, 1992, p. 529.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 523-535.

15. David Bergholz, *Five Years: 1983-1988, The Public Education Fund,* The Public Education Fund, Pittsburgh, 1988.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

17. Wendy Puriefoy, "The Interrelationship Between Program and Policy: Creating the Change Paradigm For Local Education Funds," Public Education Fund Network, Washington, D.C., 1993.

18. David Bergholz, *Five Years: 1983-1988, The Public Education Fund,* The Public Education Fund, Pittsburgh, 1988, p. 10.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 11.